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RELIGIOUS PROGRESS OF THE NEGRO.

If the genus man is a religious being, the species Negro is pre-eminently so. Wherever you find him, in whatever state of civilization, whether living as a savage in the depths of the Dark Continent or as an educated and prosperous citizen of the United States, you find him ever ready to acknowledge the claims of religion and attentive to its forms. Worship seems to be a necessity of his nature. There may be Negro atheists, but we do not hear of them; there may be Negro doubters, too sceptical or indifferent to be moved to any kind of religious exercises, but they cannot be numerous, or the fact of their existence would have been impressed upon the world.

In his native condition, on the lakes, streams, or plains of his own continent, the Negro's religion generally is of a low and degraded type, but not uniformly so. He pays divine honors to his ugly, unshapely fetich; he resorts to cruel rites to overcome malignant influences; but he also has conceptions of a *Nyangmo* who sends the sunshine and the rain, who veils his face with the clouds and makes the stars his jewels. Old Mtesa, of Uganda, on the Victoria Nyanza, whom Stanley taught Christianity at a single sitting, so to speak, worshipped the spirits of the lake—the *lubari*—but vacillated between his ancestral religion and Islam and Christianity, according as the influences in favor of the one or the other happened to predominate; and his son and successor, Mwanga, has shown the same inconsistency. But fickleness is perhaps a peculiar taint of the royal blood, for the people, receiving Christianity from faithful missionaries, attest the strength and constancy of their attachment to it by their life-blood. That the native African passes quickly and easily from his heathen rites to those of Islam and Christianity is a matter of common knowledge; but that a poor, ignorant, superstitious slave boy should in the course of a few years become an educated, dignified, respected prelate of the Church of England shows that the native African is not only capable of being educated and Christianized, but of being polished in mind, manner, and faith so that such a distinguished body as the Anglican Episcopate should delight to do him honor.

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We have in the United States, according to the last census, about seven million four hundred and seventy thousand Negroes. It is well to remember that this includes not simply pure-blooded Africans, but all those as well who have a strain of Caucasian mixed with the darker current of their slave ancestry. Mulattoes, quadroons, octoroons, all who are known to have a drop of Negro blood in their veins are classed commonly as Negroes. Of this colored population, six million eight hundred and eighty-nine thousand are to be found in the old slave territory—sixteen States, including West Virginia, with the District of Columbia and Oklahoma. This leaves not more than five hundred and eighty-one thousand for all the rest of the Union, a smaller number than competent observers generally would have ventured to ascribe to twenty-eight States and three Territories. That ninety-one per cent of the Negro population, after the lapse of nearly three decades since emancipation, is still in the South is a fact which it is important to remember in considering their present condition of religious development and how they have reached it.

Such Christian instruction as the great bulk of the Negro population received before they were emancipated was given by the white churches of these States. The religious atmosphere surrounding them was that which the white man created. The faith of the master naturally became the faith of the slave; the denominations with which he preferred to worship were likewise the choice of his black servants. If there are great numbers of colored Baptists and Methodists in the South, it is because these forms of Christianity predominate among the whites; if there are few or no colored Unitarians or Universalists, the reason is that these bodies never had a footing among the whites of the South. The same explanation accounts in part for the fact that there are comparatively few colored Roman Catholics. Louisiana is the only one of the old slave States which had any considerable number of Catholic churches, excepting, of course, Maryland, the chief city of which gave the title to the oldest archiepiscopal see in the United States. In Louisiana, therefore, and in Baltimore are to be found nine-tenths of the colored Catholics.

As Methodists and Baptists are far more numerous in the South than all other white Christians, so also do colored Methodists and Baptists greatly exceed all other colored Christians. It is not to be assumed as a matter of course that these popular forms of faith are naturally most acceptable to the Negro, and that Presbyterianism or Congregationalism or even Catholicism would not have been as cor-

dially embraced by him if any of these forms of worship had predominated among his masters. There is a quite prevalent opinion that the Negro does not take kindly to the Catholic ritual and ceremony. This is probably an inference from the fact that the number of colored Catholics is not large considering that Catholic priests have had access to the Negroes for more than a hundred years. If it is true, as has often been asserted, that the Negro is fond of that which is showy in worship, he ought to be attracted to the Catholic Church; but it is to be remembered that its service is largely conducted in a language which he does not understand and in which he cannot therefore freely take part. It leaves comparatively small play for the spontaneous expression of his feeling. Moreover, it has given him no priests of his own color until quite recently, and even yet not half a dozen in all; while the Methodist and Baptist churches have opened wide the ministerial door to him. It is also due to them to say that they were more earnestly devoted to his religious welfare in the days of slavery than any of the other denominations in the slave States.

The largest denomination of colored Christians in the South is the Regular Baptist. It has in round numbers one million two hundred and thirty thousand members. Of these, two hundred and eight thousand are in Virginia, one hundred and eighty-eight thousand four hundred in Georgia, one hundred and twenty-three thousand seven hundred in South Carolina, one hundred and ten thousand eight hundred in Mississippi, and one hundred and six thousand in North Carolina. These are the strongholds of colored Baptists. In no other State except Alabama do they approach one hundred thousand in number. These States are also, with a single exception, those in which the white Baptists are strongest. It will be interesting to compare the numerical strength of the two races in Baptist membership:

States.	Colored Members.	White Members.
Virginia.....	208,000	93,000
Georgia.....	188,400	142,500
South Carolina.....	123,700	83,600
Mississippi.....	110,800	121,500
North Carolina.....	106,000	139,000
Alabama.....	98,700	101,000
Kentucky.....	76,000	152,600
Totals.....	911,600	833,200

According to these figures, the colored Baptists exceed the white in these seven States by seventy-eight thousand four hundred. In two

of the States, South Carolina and Mississippi, the colored population is larger than the white. In Kentucky there has been a small decrease in the colored population since 1880, and in Virginia only a few thousands of increase. Louisiana is, like South Carolina and Mississippi, a Negro State; but it is not a Baptist State, having only about twenty-seven thousand white and sixty thousand colored Baptists. These figures show that as a rule where the white Baptists are most numerous the colored Baptists are particularly strong. In Virginia, however, where the colored people constitute only thirty-two per cent of the population, the colored Baptists are more than twice as numerous as the white. It is not easy to find an explanation of this notable fact.

The colored Methodists of the South are not so numerous as the colored Baptists, and they are divided among several branches. First among these branches comes the African Methodist Episcopal Church, which had its beginnings in Philadelphia in the second decade of the present century and only secured a foothold in the South after the Civil War. It had a following in South Carolina of some three thousand members in the first quarter of the century; but in consequence of excitement among the whites over an uprising of slaves, the congregations were disbanded and some of the free members went North. After the close of the war this Church was warmly welcomed in the South, and there were large accessions to it and to the Methodist Episcopal (white) and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. It now reports in all the States four hundred and fifty-two thousand seven hundred and twenty-five members. In 1866 it had but seventy-five thousand. Here is a net increase in twenty-four years of three hundred and seventy-seven thousand seven hundred and twenty-five, or more than six hundred per cent. How is it to be explained? By the fact that many of this number were already Methodists. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, which was organized in 1845 as the result of a division in the Methodist Episcopal Church on the slavery question, had gathered upward of two hundred and seven thousand colored members. It had welcomed Negroes to its own churches, building galleries for their use or providing separate pews for them on the main floor; it had assisted them to procure houses of worship for themselves, and by establishing missions among plantation Negroes and appointing its own white ministers to preach the Gospel to them it had wrought a notable work among them. In 1860 its colored members constituted about twenty-nine per cent of its entire numerical strength.

The freedom of the black man and the opening of the South to Northern churches, and the temporary prostration of the Southern Church so that it could not properly care for its colored members, led thousands of them to forsake its communion and unite with those bodies which, coming from the North, were hailed as bringing the gospel of freedom to them. The African Methodist Episcopal, the Methodist Episcopal, and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion, together with the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, which the Southern Church organized in 1870 to save the remnant of its colored constituency, shared the "spoils" which emancipation and the result of the war offered them. Each of these bodies has done a large evangelizing and educational work among the blacks, particularly the Methodist Episcopal, with its numerous and well-equipped schools, and the African Methodist Episcopal, which is more completely organized than either the Zion or the Colored branch. The combined strength of these four churches is about one million one hundred and seventy-three thousand. Other small bodies will raise the total of colored Methodists to about one million one hundred and eighty-six thousand.

These, with the colored Baptists, constitute the great bulk of colored Christians in the United States. Among the Presbyterians, North, South, and Cumberland, the Congregationalists, who have done an educational work for the freedmen second to that of no other denomination, the Disciples of Christ, the Episcopalians, including the Reformed, there are some thousands of Negroes. The Roman Catholic Church has twenty-five churches composed almost exclusively of colored persons, with a total of Negro communicants of about one hundred and twenty-one thousand. Gathered into tabular form the result is about as follows:

	Members.
Colored Baptists.....	1,230,000
Colored Methodists.....	1,186,000
Colored Catholics.....	121,000
Colored Presbyterians.....	31,500
Colored Disciples.....	31,000
Colored Congregationalists.....	6,125
Colored Episcopalians.....	4,900
Total colored Christians.....	2,610,525

This total does not include some thousands of Negro communicants scattered among white congregations, nor all colored congregations in the North and West. The census inquiry has not proceeded

far enough as yet to secure full and exact results as to colored organizations; but the final figures are not likely to add more than from thirty thousand to fifty thousand to the total above given. The proportion of communicants of all denominations to the population of the country is believed to be about one out of every three; that is, in our population of sixty-two and a half millions, we have about twenty million eight hundred and sixty-six communicants. This proportion is more than maintained among the Negroes. On the basis of their population of seven million four hundred and seventy thousand, they should have two million four hundred and ninety thousand members. They go beyond this by one hundred and twenty thousand five hundred and twenty-five, or, with due allowance for the colored congregations and members scattered through the Northern States, one hundred and sixty thousand. So far as figures go, this should be accepted as quite satisfactory.

The proportionate number of slaves who were professed Christians in 1860, which is not and cannot be known, is needed to show the full significance of the fact that in 1890 nearly one out of every three Negroes was a church-member. The proportion must have been considerably below this in 1860. Here are a few reasons for thinking so. The great body of colored Methodists in 1860 were in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The number reported was two hundred and seven thousand. Besides these, there were in the colored and other branches sixty-five thousand to seventy thousand more, making in all about two hundred and seventy-five thousand. As there were one million one hundred and eighty-six thousand in 1890, the increase since 1860 has been nine hundred and eleven thousand, or about three hundred and thirty-one per cent. Two hundred and fifty thousand would be a very liberal estimate for the number of colored Baptists in 1860. Upon this basis there has been a net gain of about nine hundred and eighty thousand colored Baptists in the thirty years, or nearly four hundred per cent. This increase must not be entirely attributed to evangelization; doubtless many colored communicants in the days of slavery were not organized into churches and reported in the denominational statistics.

Church organizations of Negroes have established, since the close of the war, universities, colleges, academies, called thousands of men into the ministry, and provided many houses of worship. The value of the property in church buildings and lots which colored Christians have acquired for public worship shows that religion is not a mere

camp-meeting affair in the thought and purpose of the Negro. The buildings in which he worships, with the ground on which they stand and their belongings, aggregate in value probably nearly or quite twenty millions of dollars. This, making due allowance for the encumbrances and for the help received from white persons, shows how ready he is to make large financial sacrifices for religion's sake, and how his industry, thrift, and business capacity have been brought into play.

The common idea respecting the Negro's religion is that it is a crude and superficial form of Christianity and exercises but little moral influence upon his life. He is religious, intensely religious, many insist, but he is not moral. Faith in a system which embraces and enforces the Ten Commandments and requires purity of life does not seem to him inconsistent with the constant violation of one or more of these commandments and with a notoriously impure career. Caught in wrong acts and publicly exposed, he feels no hesitancy in continuing his church duties and perceives no incongruity between his profession and his guilty life. Moreover, he is superstitious, still entertaining some of the crude notions of African savagery concerning witches and evil possessions and using strange ceremonies to ward off the bad spirits. There may be *voudou* doctors among them and peculiar exercises for the casting out of witches; no doubt many of them have ideas impossible to cultivated Christians.

It would be strange if it were not so. Has all trace of superstition disappeared from the Saxon Christian after centuries of cultivation in the faith? It is only fair to remember that the Negro emerged from barbarism at no ancient date; that the space of time between him and his heathen practices is measured by one or two, while that between the Anglo-Saxon and barbarism covers many centuries. It is also fair to take into account the fact that the masses of the colored race have not yet been a generation out of slavery, which, while it did not forbid but favored the religious instruction of the slave, did generally aim to keep him ignorant of books and illiterate. His illiteracy was insured in Virginia, South Carolina, and other States by laws imposing penalties on persons attempting to teach him to read or write. Of course the purpose of his owners in debarring him from educational advantages was to make him more content with his condition as a chattel. Education would have developed notions of liberty in him. Unless these vitally important considerations are kept in view, it will be impossible to arrive at any just conclusions as to what religion has done for the Negro in America.

Christianity did much for him as a slave; it can do much more for him as a free man. It made him long for freedom; the hope for freedom became a part of his religion. As one of his own race, Dr. E. W. Blyden, has eloquently expressed it:

“There streamed into the darkness of their surroundings a light from the cross of Christ, and they saw that through suffering and affliction there was a path to perfect rest above this world; and in the hours of the most degrading and exhausting toil they sang of the Eternal and the Unseen; so that while the scrupulous among their masters often, with Jefferson, ‘trembled for their country,’ the slaves who had gained a new language and new faculties were enjoying themselves in rapturous music—often laboring and suffering all day, and singing all night sacred songs, which in rude but impressive language set forth their sad fortunes and their hopes for the future.”

The slave had a capacity for moral, mental, and social improvement. The United States Commissioner of Education, the Hon. W. T. Harris, has recently said of the Negro's slave life:

“By contact with the Anglo-Saxon race in the very close relation of domestic servitude, living in the same family, and governed by the absolute authority which characterizes all family control, the Negro, after two and a half centuries, had come to possess what we may call the Anglo-Saxon consciousness.”

That is, with the exception of those in the “Black Belt” who, in plantation life, were separated from white influence, the Negro is “thoroughly imbued with nearly all the ideals and aspirations which form the conscious and unconscious motives of action with the white people among whom he lives.”

It is this consciousness which makes vain the prophecy of those who insist that his tendency, in the state of comparative isolation into which freedom and independence have brought him, is to “revert to all the distinctive features of his African ancestors.” “Freedom itself,” observes Dr. J. L. M. Curry, a Southerner and an honored Baptist minister who is deeply interested in the development of the Negro, “is self-educating.” The Negro understands what way he must take to reach the heights of superiority, and he is eagerly seizing upon the educational advantages offered him. His isolation from higher influences and models is more apparent than real, we must conclude, when we learn that a million and a quarter of Negroes were in school in the South in 1889. Education tends to make isolation impossible.

Intelligent Christians are of course the best Christians. The vastly increased school attendance of the whites of the South shows that the dominant race appreciates this truth as never before. The Southern

churches are giving more and more attention to the need of better educated colored ministers and teachers. The Northern churches have been laboring assiduously to supply this need since the war, and among the results is a large and increasingly intelligent Negro ministry and a corps of Negro teachers. The report for 1892 of the Southern Baptist (white) Home Missionary Board says of colored Baptists:

“The work of evangelization among them is largely done by their numerous ministry. The ratio of church-membership among them is greater than among the white people, even of the South. Their own efforts have enabled them out of their poverty to supply themselves in a large measure with houses of worship. Even in this respect they are not so needy as some of our white churches in various sections of the country.”

A paragraph in the report for 1889 of the Board of Missions of the Georgia Baptist Convention is significant:

“There is no mistaking the fact that there is on the part of the Negroes an earnest desire to acquire knowledge. This is seen in their anxiety to get books and to read them, and very marked in sending their children to the schools through the country. In this respect they show more concern than the illiterate whites.”

Their progress has been moral as well as educational. A recommendation which closes the episcopal address to the General Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1888 speaks volumes both as to the prevalence of immorality and the discernment of it: “No bigamist shall have any place either in our conferences or churches”; that is, either among ministers or members. When this same Church entered South Carolina after the war, the ministers from the North had, says one of their members, James H. A. Johnson, D.D., even to teach the plantation Negroes how to receive the bread and wine of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. He adds:

“The domestic relationship was so debasing by an ignorance of connubial rites that some remedy had to be supplied for it. Those who had been for a long time living together as man and wife were joined as husband and wife. Funerals had to be regulated in order that they might be characterized by the solemnity due them.”

Dr. Curry says that religion and virtue “are often considered distinct and separate things” in the “Black Belt.” The hopeful feature of the case lies in the Negro's growing sense of the incongruity of religion and immorality and in his appeals to his own people to aspire to purer lives.

Everybody knows into what excesses the emotional nature of the Negro often leads him in worship. But everybody does not know what efforts his bishops and ministers are making to correct these abuses. I cannot forbear quoting somewhat at length from Bishop D. A. Payne's "Recollections of Seventy Years," a most interesting book by a refined and cultured Negro leader and bishop, to show the common form these excesses take and how he has sought to induce the ministers to abolish them:

"In 1878 I attended a 'bush-meeting,' where I went to please the pastor whose circuit I was visiting. After the sermon they formed a ring, and with coats off sang, clapped their hands, and stamped their feet in a most ridiculous and heathenish way. I requested the pastor to go and stop their dancing. At his request they stopped their dancing and clapping of hands, but remained singing and rocking their bodies to and fro. This they did for about fifteen minutes. I then went, and taking their leader by the arm requested him to desist and to sit down and sing in a rational manner. I told him also that it was a heathenish way to worship, and disgraceful to themselves, the race, and the Christian name. In that instance they broke up their ring, but would not sit down, and walked sullenly away. After the sermon in the afternoon, having another opportunity of speaking alone to this young leader of the singing and clapping ring, he said, 'Sinners won't get converted unless there is a ring.' Said I, 'You might sing till you fell down dead, and you would fail to convert a single sinner, because nothing but the Spirit of God and the Word of God can convert sinners.' He replied: 'The Spirit of God works upon the people in different ways. At camp-meetings there must be a ring here, a ring there, a ring over yonder, or sinners will not get converted.' . . . These 'bands' I have had to encounter in many places. . . . In some cases all that I could do was to teach and preach the right, fit, and proper way of serving God."

The Negro imitates his white brethren in many things, both good and bad. He imbibes to some extent their sectarian feeling; Negro Baptists delight in making proselytes of Negro Methodists, and *vice versa*. In some directions, however, the Negro will not follow his white brethren. Among the whites are many thousands known as "Primitive," "Old School," or "Hard-Shell" Baptists. They do not believe in Sunday-schools or missionary societies, and are otherwise antiquated and unprogressive in their notions. The great mass of Negro Baptists are of the progressive sort. Probably not as many as five hundred of them belong to the "Old School." They are heartily and almost invariably "New School" Christians.

H. K. CARROLL

